Hi Phil,

In your email 13/8 you kindly asked me to let you know how else you could help with my project. Whereas I would really welcome some active support, I don't want to impose on you. So the extent to which you may be able to help will depend a lot on your motivation. It may assist you to decide how and if you want to help me, if you understand something of the background.

As background, I resigned my commission as an ALO in 1960 for two major reasons. One was the practice of promotion on the basis of seniority – ability had little to do with promotion decisions. After leaving the service I spent 25 years with IBM where a major philosophy was achievement of results. The second was the prevalence of alcohol consumption in the wardroom, especially during the day. Shortly after I became a civilian, the Voyager disaster and Peter Cabban's involvement in the two Royal commissions thoroughly highlighted the alcohol consumption issue.

Over succeeding years my disenchantment with the service mellowed to the point that one day in 1990 I met up with a couple of my old buddies for drink and nostalgia chat. These were Gerald York and Des Miller. As is typical, the inevitable question was asked "What ever happened to so & so?" with the occasional response "Oh he died". To cut the story to its essentials, before we all died, I decided to write a history of our group who were trained at the Adelaide School of Mines (now part of the Uni of SA) in the years 1946-1949. This was an important event, without which the Navy would have been without sufficient technicians to maintain the electronics equipment in the fleet and shore establishments, because of the rapid demobilisation rate of the Hostilities Only Radio Mechanics following the end of WW2. In the process of researching that history for publication, a small group of those whom I had contacted suggested that we should have a reunion. This we did in 1992 in Adelaide. This in turn led to the formation of our RAN Radio Mechanics Association, which now has 619 members resident in all states, NZ, UK and the USA. We have biennial reunions in a different city each time, and publish a quarterly newsletter.

In 2000/2001 I researched and produced for the Queensland reunion in 2002 a history of the war time RMs, the H.O.R.Ms. This was an 80 page A4 sized document which summarised the service details of approximately 360 HORMs recruited and trained during the WW2 years, and the detailed stories of 20 whom I selected.

Next effort was to create a summary of the history of radar in the RAN. This ran to 60 pages. The editor of the journal of the Naval Historical Society of Australia published an edited version of this in the September 2006 issue. Dr Ian Pfennigwerth, the editor, felt that a suitable follow on to this article would be one dealing with the history of R.A.N. aviation radar, which is what I am now working on
.

My research is in the following areas:

1. The overarching backdrop to the decision making process related to the selection of equipment.
2. Details of the name and the type of radar fitted in the various R.A.N. aircraft.
3. Operational issues.
4. The migration from what I call the direct interactive process of target engagement to that of multiple interaction between a number of attacking units. An example of the former is the Sea Venom Observer identifying a target and directing the pilot accordingly. An example of the latter is where the data derived by the attacking aircraft is shared with other units, where the decision process is largely automated (elimination of human intervention) and where the attack is carried out by a suite of units and weapons.

Regarding 2 above, I have good info on Firefly 6 and its radar AN/APS-4, of Sea Venom and its radar AI Mk 17, of the Gannet and its radar Mk 19B, of the Tracker and its radar AN/APS-8, and of Skyhawk and its radar APG-53A. However I have quite literally nothing on other aircraft such as Wessex 31A/31B, Sea King 50A or the early trainers Dakota and HS748.

This is where I am at right now, with perhaps 12 months max before the draft is to be submitted to Ian P. for editing.

Let me assume, perhaps optimistically and naively, that you might want to spend a bit of your time doing some digging. Via the internet into Australian Archives, there might be found some relevant historical info circa late 1940s/early 1950s revealing the decisions made about equipment procurement and second line servicing in relation to Firefly 5s & 6s. As well similar info relating to Gannets, Venoms, Trackers, Skyhawk et al. You might even have a contact at Navy Office.

Your story about John Da Costa is suitable for inclusion under the operational banner. I would like more of these, hence my requests to a number of ex aircrew, few of whom feel inclined to respond. However, as one of my mottos is “dum spiro spero”, something will turn up soon. These also could be a source of material for inclusion under my point 4 above.

I envisage there will be two end products. One for general consumption will be Ian P’s edited version of the article which will appear in the September 2008 issue of the NHSA journal. The other will be the source data which I am accumulating in a large 3 ring binder. The ultimate destination for this will be the library of our RM Association in our Adelaide HO. For any who may be interested, we can produce copies at a nominal charge.

Well there it is mate, long winded but as you seem a bit interested, I felt it appropriate to give you a full picture. If I have overwhelmed you and you would prefer not to be part of this, so be it. But if you would like to continue to feed me with snippets, I would be very grateful.

Cheers,

George Stevens
14 August 2007

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